

one day. On the second day the water outside the bay was still too rough so we dove the large Kingscote Wharf. It was a great muck dive site where we found many crabs, two cuttlefish, sponges, yellow cup corals, and several types of unique nudibranchs and juvenile fish. On our second dive, Jim found two leafy sea dragons. With its multiple green leafy appendages, this was the most beautiful critter I've ever seen in the sea. Although the water was really cold (51 degrees) and the air temp was only about 55, we found the leafys and had a great time. (Ph: 61 8 8559 3225; e-mail kids@kin.on.net; website www.kidivingsafaris.com)

COOK ISLANDS

Tucked between French Polynesia and Tonga, the Cook Islands have from time to time tried to promote themselves as a dive destination. They've never really succeeded - even though the main island of Rarotonga has good food and a wide variety of places to stay. There's a decent dive through a cut into the lagoon that has good sharks and strong current, but overall the diving doesn't measure up to other South Pacific locations. . . .

Cook Island Divers, Local Lodge, September 2001, Tim McKenzie, Canberra, ACT. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 10 to 40 Meters. Water: 23 to 24 Celsius, choppy. We had high hopes for this trip with our Australian Dive club. The viz was supposed to be spectacular and the diving great. Well

— viz was good. Water touted at 26-27 C but was significantly colder and several of us borrowed/hired additional protection as our 3mm suits were simply not enough. Bring a 5mm. The Dive shop was pretty good, picked us up in the morning (7:45am) and took us down to the shop. They have three RIBs that seem more than adequate for your needs. We had ten in the group and the RIBs weren't too crowded. Good tank racks. Initial equipment set up at the shop (new compressors) then into our suits and down to the dock in their van. There seemed to be a wind blowing most days but as the island is small it was always possible to find the lee side. Our dive guide Mel was great and helpful but one "guide" to ten divers meant we all had to load up the boats and help ourselves. Not an issue as we were all experienced. Initial dive was obviously a check out for Mel to see what we were like. Only dive we were asked to stay at or above a certain depth (25 meters) to see what we were like. After that essentially free for all, with Mel leading the group if they wanted to go with him. The disappointing thing was the "bio-diversity" — or lack of it. The corals (most hard — few soft) were dull and lifeless looking. They appeared healthy not bleached, but far from spectacular. The fish life was also pretty sparse. Yes the viz was great — but it emphasized the lack of critters! Occasionally we saw small reef sharks — Mel very excited. Also found a few *Helgardia* nudibranchs and one Spanish dancer. There are a few small wrecks which we dived for variety but

in honesty this is the closest I have come to being bored diving! There were two dives a day and supposedly the option for a night dive but we didn't bother. Other islands in the Cooks may have a better reputation — but for our money and time, we would not bother returning to Rarotonga to dive. (Ph: 888-994-2665 or 682-22 483; e-mail gwilson@ci-divers.co.ck; website www.cookpages.com/CookIslandDivers)

Fiji

For Left Coasters, it's easier to get to Fiji than to the Caribbean: ten hours nonstop from L.A. Airfare and an all-inclusive week at many excellent resorts can be had for under \$2500 per person; air packages can be tailored to include New Zealand/Australia extensions at little extra cost. Sunflower Air is more squared-away than Fiji Air for local flights. . . . Fijians are polite, friendly, delightful, modest, and religious, so watch your language, and wear non-revealing clothes to town. Guys, have someone teach you how to tie a sulu so you, too, can go home in a skirt. . . . Wetsuits are a staple year-round; currents add coolness, just like the wind chill factor. . . . Taveuni has great diving but it's terrible for beginners with difficult currents; bring a compass, and carry both day and night emergency surface signaling devices (tubes, strobes). . . . The weather can be stormy June through September; short, heavy

showers are possible any afternoon year-round. The year-round average temperature is 80 or above; nights average 68-69 degrees in winter; bring a sweater. . . .

Beqa Island/Beqa Lagoon

Lalati Resort, February 2002, Craig Condron (lindacondron@hotmail.com) **Nine Mile Falls, WA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 65 to 90 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm choppy. The bures are large and comfortable and they have made every effort to protect the environment. They reuse all the water in gardens and the toilet waste is aerobically and anaerobically disposed of. The staff was wonderful and they treated us as if we were a part of the family. The owner and manager ate meals with us and were available always. Beato, the manager/chef was a true delight. His food preparation, sauces, desserts were to die for and the menu was always changing with different ethnic dishes every day. The diving was wonderful. The visibility, because of recent storms, was only about 75' but Seta, Lalati's divemaster, made up for this slight imperfection. He knows the location of every little creature in Beqa Lagoon, leaf fish (including a purple variety), blue ribbon eels, anemone shrimp, etc. Their dive boat is large and spacious for a 5-bure resort. During our eight days and two dives per day, two divemasters and four guests were the max. The only downside is the lack of a large beach (small but acceptable) but they will take you five minutes by